

Mrs. Hubbard's Three Warnings

It was in the days of our grandmothers, when there were brick ovens in the land, that Mr. Hubbard bought his house; and bought it very much against his wife's will. It was a lonely house, and reported to be haunted. It was next to a graveyard, which though unused was not cheerful, and which had likewise the reputation of a ghost. However, Mr. Hubbard did not believe in ghosts, and was too cheerful to be depressed by warnings, and never intended to be lonely.

"Mrs. Hubbard," he said, when his wife shook her head over the purchase, "I got it cheap, and it is a good one. You will like it when you get there. If you don't, why then talk."

So the house was bought, and into it the Hubbard family went. There was scarcely a chance for a ghost to show his face amid such a family of boys and girls. Mr. And Mrs. Hubbard counted ten of them, all noisy ones.

Having once expostulated and spoken out her mind as to the house, Mrs. Hubbard gave up the point. She scrubbed and scoured, tacked down carpets and put up curtains, and owned that the place was pretty. As not a ghost appeared for a week, she made up her mind that there were no such inhabitants; she even began not to mind the tombstones. So the house got to rights at last, and baking day came about. In the press of business, they had a great deal of baker's bread, and were now tired of it.

Mrs. Hubbard never enjoyed setting a batch of bread to rise as she did that which was to be eaten for the first time in the new house.

"For I cannot get up an appetite for stuff that nobody knows who has had the making of," said Mrs. Hubbard, "and all puffy and alummy besides."

So into the oven went the bread, and out it came at the proper time, even and brown and beautiful as loaves could be. Mrs. Hubbard turned them on their sides as she drew them forth, and they stood in the long bread-tray, glorious proofs of her skill and the excellence of the oven, when Tommy Hubbard bounded in. Tommy was four; and when at that age we are prone to believe that anything will bear our weight. Tommy, therefore, anxious to inspect the newly-made bread, swung himself off his feet by clutching the edge of the bread-tray, and over it came, loaves and Tommy and all.

Mrs. Hubbard flew to the rescue and picked up the loaves. All were dusted and put in the tray again but one. That lay bottom upwards under the table.

"A bothering child, to give me so much trouble!" she said, as she crawled under the table to get it. "A—O—ah—dear, dear, dear—oh—O my——"

And there on the floor sat Mrs. Hubbard, screaming, wringing her hands and shaking her head. The children screamed in concert. Mr. Hubbard rushed in from the garden where he was at work.

“What's the matter, mother?” he gasped.

Mrs. Hubbard pointed to the bottom of the loaf lying in her lap.

“Look there and see!” she said. “It is a warning, William; I am going to be taken from them all.”

And he looked; and he saw a death's-head and cross-bones, as plainly engraved as they possibly could be.

“It is accident,” said Mr. Hubbard. “Such queer cranks do come, you know.”

But Mrs. Hubbard was in a troubled state of mind, as was but natural.

“The stories about the haunted house were true,” she said; “and the spirits have marked the loaf. I am afraid it is a warning.”

And the loaf was put aside, for even Mr. Hubbard did not dare to eat any of it.

Mrs. Hubbard got over her fright at last, but the news of the awfully marked loaf spread through R——, and the people came to Hubbard's all the week to look at it. It was a death's-head and cross bones certainly; everyone saw that at a glance, but as to its meaning, people differed. Some believed that it was a warning of approaching death; some thought that the spirits wanted to frighten the Hubbards away, and get possession of the house again, all to themselves. This latter supposition inspired Mrs. Hubbard with courage; finally, being a brave woman, she adopted the belief, and when another baking day arrived, put her loaves into the oven once more, prepared for cross-bones, and not to be frightened by them. The loaves baked as before. They came out brown and crusty as Mrs. Hubbard turned each in her hands. There were no cross-bones visible, but on the last were sundry characters or letters. What, no one could tell, until there dropped in for a chat a certain printer of the neighbourhood, accustomed to reading things backward.

“By George,” said he, “that is curious. That *is* curious—r-e-s-u-r-g-a-m resurgam; that is what is on the loaf—resurgam.”

“It is what they put on tombs, isn't it?” asked poor Mrs. Hubbard, faintly.

“Well, yes,” said Mr. Hubbard, being obliged to admit it. “But it is not so bad as cross-bones and skulls.”

Mrs. Hubbard shook her head.

“It's even solemn,” said the little woman, who was not as good a linguist as bread maker. “I feel confident, William, that I shall soon be resurgamed, and what will these dear children do then?”

And now that the second loaf was before her eyes, marked even more awfully than the first, Mrs. Hubbard grew really pale and thin, and lost her cheerfulness.

“I have a presentiment,” she said, over and over again, “that the third baking will decide who the warning belongs to. I believe it is meant for me, and time will show. Don't you see how thin I am growing?”

And though Mr. Hubbard laughed, he also began to be troubled. The third baking day was one of gloom. Solemnly, as at a funeral, the family assembled to assist in the drawing.

Five loaves came out markless; but one remained.

Mrs. Hubbard's hand trembled; but she drew it forth; she laid it on the tray; she turned softly about. At last she exposed the lower surface. On it were letters printed backward, plain enough to read this time, and arranged thus:—

“Died April 2nd,
lamented by
her large family.”

“It is me,” cried Mrs. Hubbard. “I am to go tomorrow. This is the 1st. I do feel faint. Yes, I do. It is awful, and so sudden.”

And Mrs. Hubbard fainted away in the arms of the most terrified of men and husbands.

The children screamed, the cat mewed, the dog barked. The oldest boy ran for the doctor. People flocked to the Hubbards. The loaf was examined. Yes, there was Mrs. Hubbard's warning—her call to quit this world.

She lay in bed, bidding good-bye to her family and friends, her strength going fast. She read her Bible, and tried not to grieve too much. The doctor shook his head. The clergyman prayed with her. Nobody doubted that her end was at hand, for people were very superstitious in those days.

They had been up all night with good Mrs. Hubbard, and dawn was breaking, and with it she was sure that she must go; when, clattering over the road and up to the door came a horse, and on the horse came a man, who alighted. He rattled the knocker and rushed in. There was no stopping him. Up the stairs he went to Mrs. Hubbard's room, and bolted into it.

Everyone stared at him, as he took off his hat.

“Parding,” said he, breathlessly, “I heard Mrs. Hubbard was a dying—and she'd warnings on her bakings. I came over to explain. You see I was sexton of the church here a few years ago, and I know all about it. You needn't die of fear just yet, Mrs. Hubbard, for it is neither spirits nor devils about; nor yet warnins. What marks the loaves is old Mrs. Finkle's tombstone. I took it for an oven-bottom, seeing there were no survivors, and bricks were dear. The last folks before you didn't get them printed off on their loaves, because they used tins; and we got used to the marks ourselves. Cross-bones and skulls we put up with, and never thought of caring for the resurgam. So you see how it is, and I am sorry you've been scared.”

March 1, 1869

Mrs.hubbard

Nobody said a word. The minister shut his book. The doctor walked to the window. There was a deadly silence. Mrs. Hubbard sat up in bed.

“William!” said she to her husband, “the first thing you do, get a new bottom to that oven.”

And the tone assured the assemblage of anxious friends that Mrs. Hubbard was not going to die just yet.

Indeed she came down the very next day. And when the oven had been reconstructed, the first thing she did was to give invitations for a large tea-drinking. On which occasion the loaves came out right.

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Once a Month, July 1869, pp. 35-38

Pleasant Hours, Vol. VII, 1870, pp. 382-383